

Language Appreciation Among Elders and Learners from Indigenous Peoples' Communities

Kathrina Lorraine Lucasan,
Dina Ocampo,
Anne Sheila Choi,
Rozanno Rufino
University of the Philippines Center for
Integrative and Development Studies – Education Research Program
kmlucasan@up.edu.ph

Abstract

Language is considered a part of living or intangible heritage and, as such, is transmitted from generation to generation. For indigenous communities, the function of language is beyond communication. It is integral to their identities and the preservation of their cultures. Language appreciation is defined as the “recognition of worth through analytical perception and keen insight” (Brooks, 1977, p.263). This paper identifies language appreciation indicators to deepen the understanding of how languages are valued. Indicators were generated from focus group discussions with Filipino indigenous peoples (IP) community elders as well as interactive activities conducted with IP learners from Grades 5-6. These activities included the use of language portraits, activities using illustrations of community life, and pictures depicting emotions. Similar themes emerged from the responses of the IP elders and learners, namely cultural identity, connection to the ancestral domain/environment, community life, and indigenous knowledge. Though comparable, different language appreciation themes were generated for their mother tongue and for the additional languages they speak. These findings are relevant to understanding the value of languages in the curriculum as they provide insights into multilingual and multiliteracy education in the Philippines.

Keywords

Language appreciation, indigenous peoples, Philippines, cultural identity, multilingual education, indigenous peoples' education

Introduction and key literature

Language has always been a key element in indigenous peoples' (IP) assertion of their right to culture-based education (UNESCO 2003; DepEd 2011, 2015; United Nations, 2019). Understanding the dispositions of multilingual indigenous peoples towards their different languages could help them assert their right to cultural identity and integrity.

In the Philippines, Section 4 of Republic Act (RA) No. 8371 (Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) 1997) stipulates that “adherence of indigenous peoples to their respective customs, beliefs, traditions, indigenous knowledge systems and practices, and the assertion of their character and identity as indigenous peoples shall remain inviolable.” Supporting this, RA 10533 (Enhanced Basic Education Act 2013) states that instruction, teaching materials, and assessment be conducted in the regional or native language of learners from kindergarten to

Grade 3. It also mandates the implementation of an "Indigenous Peoples' Education Program" which emphasizes the "engagement of elders and other community members in the teaching-learning process [and] assessment" (DepEd, 2013, p.2).

UNESCO (2003) adopted the term "multilingual education" in 1999 to refer to the use of at least three languages: the mother tongue (MT), a regional or national language, and an international language in education. Filipino is the national language (Language 2 or L2) and English is an official language (L3). Tagalog is one of the dominant languages in the country on which Filipino, the national language, is mainly based.

The Philippine Context

In 2009, the Department of Education (DepEd) released its policy on institutionalizing the use of the MT as medium of instruction (L1) from preschool to at least grade 3, and as an auxiliary language in the secondary level. The most recent policy (2019) offers guidance on possible language scenarios in classrooms. It also defines Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) as the effective use of more than two languages in teaching and learning, starting from the language that the learner is more familiar with before introducing other languages. It states that the MT should be used strictly as the sole medium of teaching and learning in all domains of kindergarten and for all learning areas in Grades 1-3. The MT may also be used for transition or bridging and/or as an auxiliary language up to Grade 6 (DepEd, 2019). However, even before the policies mentioned were released, the use of MT in instruction as a policy reform was already underscored by the 1991 Congressional Commission on Education Report (EDCOM Report) and the report of the Presidential Commission on Educational Reform 2000 (Andaya, 2019).

Since the DepEd's adoption of a National Indigenous Peoples' Education (IPEd) Policy Framework (2011), it has established mechanisms for community engagement and closer collaboration between indigenous elders, schools, and other basic education programs (DepEd, 2013, 2015, 2017). Resulting from the dialogue between DepEd, community elders and IPEd practitioners, an IPEd Curriculum Framework was formulated to guide the interfacing of the national education system with indigenous learning systems and indigenous knowledge systems and practices (DepEd, 2015). Understanding this interface between the educational system and IP communities is key to further improving policies on languages of learning (Ocampo and Lucasan, 2019).

This paper aims to provide insights into IPEd and languages of learning by investigating the framework of language appreciation in the context of IP experiences through the following questions:

1. What are the themes and indicators of language appreciation according to IP elders and learners?
2. What themes and indicators of language appreciation are unique to their mother tongue?

Against this, the next section will consider language appreciation as a conceptual framework. Then the article will discuss the research methods and analysis applied, followed by the

findings organized according to the research questions. Following these is a discussion of the findings and the language appreciation indicators generated from the data gathered. The paper ends with a conclusion and some recommendations.

Conceptual Framework: Language Appreciation in the Context of IPEd

Language appreciation is the “recognition of worth through analytical perception and keen insight” (Brooks, 1977, p. 263). Indicators of language appreciation are either quantitative (using numbers to describe objects/phenomena) or qualitative (using symbols, verbal, visual, textual as well as numerical information to depict a state, or an observation) (UNESCO, 2019).

Building on the findings of Brooks (1977) and the statements in DepEd (2011; 2013; 2015; 2017), UNESCO (2003) and United Nations (2019) on the role of language in IP communities, it may be deduced that indicators of language appreciation result from experiences of language use. The community’s MT is especially valuable for IP communities because of its link to their culture and heritage. Systematizing the use of the MT and other languages in school strengthens this link and boosts the community’s appreciation not only for their language but also for other languages.

It is proposed that membership in IP communities, culture, and an MTB-MLE program influence language appreciation. The relationships, overlaps and distinctions among these aspects may be explored through structured interactions with IP community members. Figure 1 illustrates this possible relationship between language appreciation and the IP community, culture, and the MTB-MLE program. This is the framework that was explored in this research.

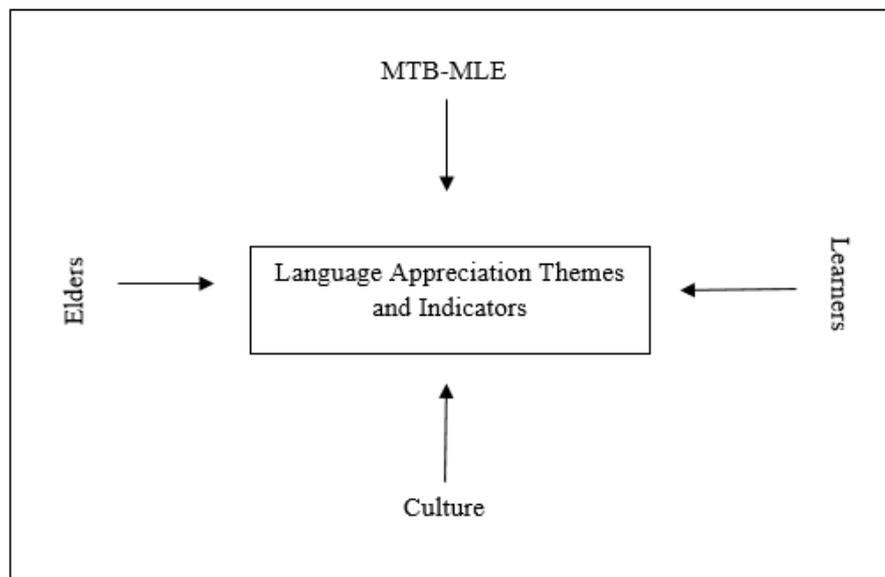


Figure 1. Proposed Framework for Language Appreciation in the Context of IPEd

Research Methods and Analysis

This qualitative research was conducted in communities with whom the researchers had already formed relationships, where they were part of the community's sharing circle (Adonis and Couch, 2017). Consistent with ethical research principles and existing partnership in promoting IPEd between communities and researchers, informed prior consent was obtained from all participants.

Participants were from five IP communities: Agta-Dumagat of General Nakar Quezon; Iraya Mangyan of San Teodoro, Oriental Mindoro; Ayta Mag-indi of Porac, Pampanga; an Ata elder from the Paquibato District, Davao City; and a Hanunuo Mangyan elder from Mansalay, Oriental Mindoro. Most of the schools that participated in the study began using the MT for teaching and learning in 2013, with two starting earlier. The Agta-Dumagat and Iraya Mangyan schools started their education program in 1987 and 2010 respectively.

Fifteen IP elders (12 males and three females) served as resources. The perspectives and opinions of elders were considered essential in this study because they are recognized "culture bearers" who are "acknowledged repositories of their peoples' history, practices, beliefs, and knowledge systems having faithfully and truthfully practiced these as taught to them by their own elders" (DepEd, 2015, p. 8). Focus group discussions (Hennink, 2014) and key informant interviews (Wilson and Sapsford, 2006) were conducted with the elders, utilizing discussion guides.

Twenty-nine learners (12 male and 17 female) from Grades 5 and 6 participated in this study. All had been pupils during the implementation of the MTB-MLE program, providing program beneficiary perspectives. All members of the Grades 5 and 6 classes of the Agta-Dumagat and Iraya Mangyan communities participated while the Ayta Mag-indi learners were chosen based on their home's proximity to the school because of a storm on the fieldwork day. Interactive response elicitation enabled learners to construct their language self-concepts through language portraits. (Busch, 2018). Collaboratively, they showed language functions by creating language charts. Finally, they shared their regard for languages through an "emoji mat" which featured emoticons depicting different emotions (Hyvonen et al. 2014). Conversations were recorded and transcribed.

Thematic analysis was conducted through response coding and mapping (Stemler, 2001), allowing researchers to organize repeating ideas according to the research questions. A number of these themes are discussed below.

Findings

The findings have been generated by the research questions. The first research question aimed to generate themes and indicators of language appreciation while the second research question aimed to identify themes and indicators unique to MT appreciation. Themes derived from responses are presented together with corresponding data evidence.

Language Appreciation Themes and Indicators

Six themes for language appreciation were derived from elder responses (these have been italicized below for easy reference). These revolved mostly around how languages serve as links for deeper communication within and outside the community and between community members and their heritage.

Firstly, elders repeatedly mentioned how languages are vital for various *communication* purposes. Community members use their MT to communicate with each other while they use other languages to communicate with non-community members. According to the elders, the MT “deepens the connection of community members and fosters love and unity” and is “the best way to understand fellow community members.” One elder relayed how it may also be used when community members want to discuss private concerns, or those they deem internal to their community.

The value of other languages was also highlighted by elders as one of them stated, “communities should also be open to connecting with others.” All elder statements pertaining to the value of other languages point to how knowledge of other languages enable them to understand those from outside the community, including foreigners who come and visit, interact with other communities, and understand legal documents. They acknowledge the importance of maintaining connections outside their community. One elder provided an example of how knowledge of the region’s lingua franca allowed them to communicate with people perceived to be “in power”, e.g. from the government.

In addition, three kinds of links were identified in the themes generated from the elders. These were between members and their *cultural identity*, their *indigenous knowledge*, and their *ancestral domain*. Elders stated how their MT is among their “community’s treasures,” their “inheritance from their ancestors” and “source of wisdom,” and is used in the “articulation of customary law.” Another also stated that “language is important because it is an indicator of who you are, what kind of person you are, and the community that you come from.” The MT is also important “because it may be used to take care of our ancestral domain.” Another elder expounded that “if our language disappears, our connection with nature will be affected. The names of the spirits guarding the environment are in our mother tongue.”

Aside from the link between the community members and their heritage, language is identified as a means to *understand other cultures*. Here the link pertains to other groups and communities. As one elder said, other languages “widen understanding of other communities and their culture.” Another stated that “there are other cultures that we will only know when we know how to speak other languages.”

The final theme generated was on *multilingualism benefits for learners*. One elder stated that it will ensure community learners will not be “left behind” and another mentioned that Tagalog was also important as it is being used in school.

Six similar themes were generated from the learners. Like the elders, learners acknowledged the importance of language when *communicating* and *for daily life*. Again, similarly, learners mentioned the importance of knowledge of both MT and other languages as they are used *for school activities*. Furthermore, learners stated the importance of language as they *think and express themselves* and acknowledged that languages are their *link to their environment and ancestral domain*.

To illustrate these points further, Figure 2 showcases multicolored language portraits, signifying use and appreciation of different languages.

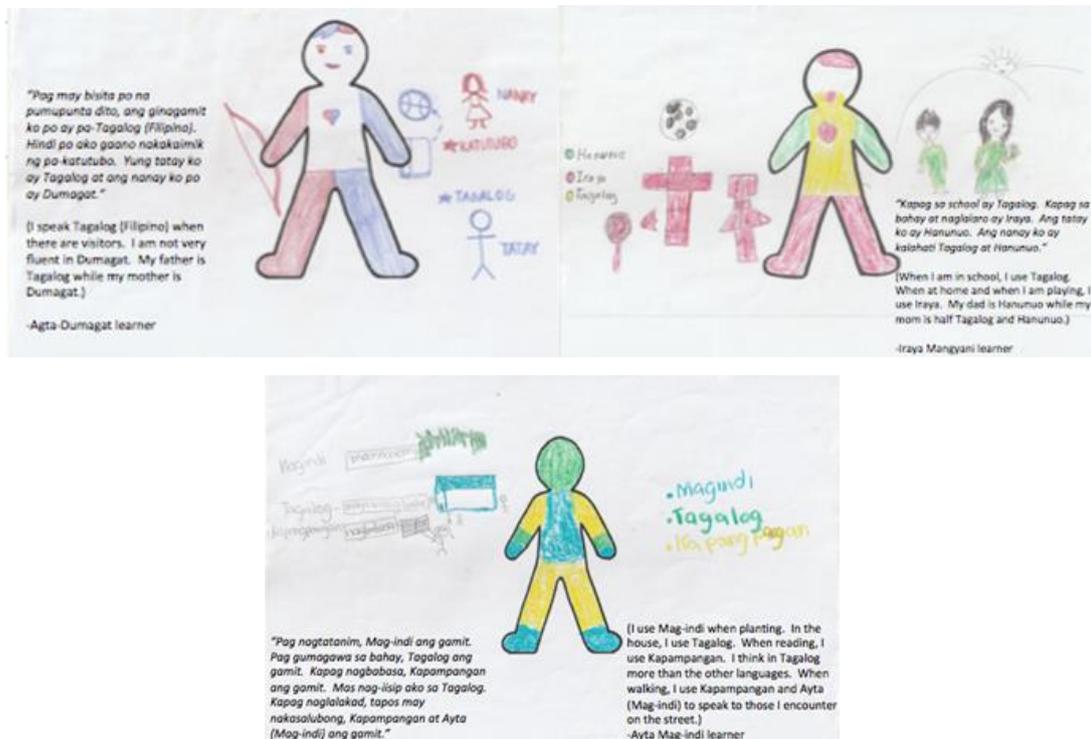


Figure 2. Sample Language Portraits

The findings show that the themes generated from the responses of elders and learners resonate with each other. Languages are important for communication, serve as links to their heritage, and are beneficial for learners.

Themes and Indicators Unique to Mother Tongue

The second research question aimed to identify themes of appreciation unique to the MT. From the six themes generated, three of these are unique to the MT. *Communication* was also mentioned as a theme in MT appreciation, but the elders were specific in mentioning the use of their MT to communicate within the community. Meanwhile, *cultural identity* emerged as the main theme for MT appreciation. Accentuated during the conversations with the IP elders was how much they value their MT because it links them to their culture, identity, ancestors, and to each other. Its loss would be equivalent to the loss of their community. Thus, they likened their MT to a "weapon against the erosion of their culture."

MT as a vehicle for the *transmission of indigenous knowledge* and *connection with the ancestral domain* also registered as unique responses for MT appreciation. The elders connected their MT with indigenous knowledge by identifying it as the vessel of their "collective wisdom."

Analysis of data from the learners' language chart and language portraits showed no unique themes regarding MT appreciation. Responses showed that regional and national languages seem to be more commonly used.

However, the unique aspect of MT appreciation was elicited in the *emoji* mat activity. According to learners, they were happiest when using the MT. Most learners indicated that they were “happy,” with some indicating they feel “very happy” when the teacher uses the MT in class, or when they read a story written in their MT. A few remarked that they were “surprised.”

In contrast, when asked about doing tasks in Filipino and English, learners commonly revealed that they feel “nervous” or “sad” and “needed thinking time”. However, around half felt “happy” when listening to stories in Filipino and English, and when the teacher used these languages in discussions.

Some language portrait responses also indicated how a number of these learners seem to value MT the most. For example, even if all learners included Filipino in their language portraits, some mentioned a unique appreciation for their MT over and above other languages. In one language portrait, an Agta-Dumagat learner explained how her MT is “in her heart” and therefore, Filipino is not as valuable despite using it in various contexts.

Discussion

Language appreciation themes generated from elders’ and learners’ responses were similar, with communication emerging as a top theme for both groups, followed by language’s intricate relationship with cultural identity, not just for their group, but also for other groups. Both elders and learners provided many reasons why learning languages (not just their MT) is valuable and important. IP elders emphasized how their MTs in particular serve as both a vessel for their indigenous knowledge and a direct link to their ancestral domain and environment, which is why the use of MT is so highly regarded. These findings align with the statements of UNESCO (2003) and UN (2007), illustrating how IP communities in the Philippines value languages.

Language chart and language portrait responses revealed, however, that most learners use other languages more than their MT. This could be because of community location and intermarriage with those outside the community, mentioned by both elders and learners. Despite learners seemingly using other languages more, findings show that they value their MT and link positive emotions to MT use, suggesting that the language is part of their community’s intangible heritage (UNESCO, 2003). This may mean that though they use it in lesser scenarios, their responses with the emoji mat showed they are happiest when using the MT, meaning that it is very likely that they will continue to use it and pass it on (Boon and Polinsky, 2015).

Though learners reported feeling nervous, sad, and in need of more thinking time when using other languages, a large number were still happy to do tasks in Filipino and English. This may indicate how learners are already starting the transition to Filipino and English, which is in the design of the MTB-MLE program as articulated in the DepEd policy 2019. None of the learners, however, included English in their language portraits which may signify that they do not consider English as part of their identity.

Indicators of Language Appreciation

Elder and learner responses affirm the value of the MT and other languages for their communities. The experiences that the elders relayed, the learner responses in the language chart, language portrait descriptions, and emoji mat choices made by learners provided support for these affirmations and, following UNESCO's definition of qualitative indicators, served as the "symbols, and verbal, visual, and textual information" to generate indicators for language appreciation.

Based on data analysis, the following are the proposed indicators of language appreciation:

1. Usefulness of language for communication
2. Usefulness of language for social interaction in the community
3. Usefulness of language for accessing media and information
4. Usefulness of language for learning subject areas in school

In addition, the following are the proposed language appreciation indicators unique to MT:

1. Awareness of the relationship of the MT and cultural identity
2. Awareness of the connection between the MT and ancestral domain
3. Awareness of the codification of indigenous knowledge in their MT
4. Identification of the MT as language of community life

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper aimed to provide a deeper understanding of the interface between basic education policy on languages of learning by discussing the themes and indicators of language appreciation generated from IP elders and learners. Using Brooks' (1977) definition of language appreciation, it can be concluded that "through analytical perception and keen insight," the study participants "recognized the worth" of not only their MT but of the other languages used in the area as well. Without the MTB-MLE program, realizations of the advantages of multilingual education may not have occurred. The proposed theoretical framework in Figure 3 extends Brooks' definition.

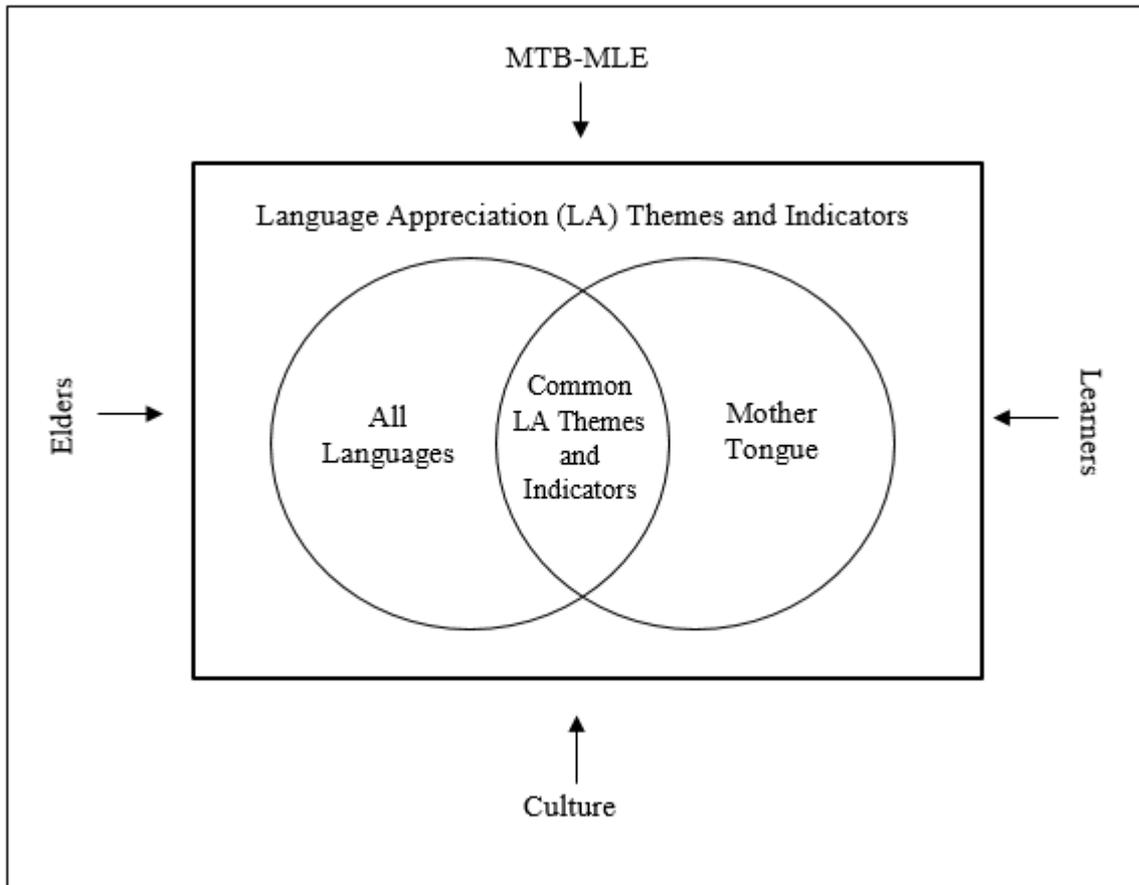


Figure 3. Derived Framework for Language Appreciation in the Context of IPEd

The language appreciation themes and indicators can be categorized by language according to the IP community member respondents. Language appreciation is influenced by the community members' experiences, their culture, and implementation of the MTB-MLE program.

Learners, though they do find it easier to do tasks in their MT, are willing to use other languages and this may be because of the confidence developed in the earlier grades when classes were taught more exclusively in their MT. For elders, the use of the MT serves two purposes: to help children learn, and to preserve their MT. As a minority language, there is always a risk that their language will die out as speakers of the language dwindle. As such, they recognize that DepEd's MTB-MLE program is a very important tool in preserving their MT and thus the culture and way of life for IP communities. Therefore, these findings should be considered in the improvement of policies on languages of learning in Philippine schools.

The indicators generated through this study may be used to determine language appreciation of members of other IP and non-IP communities. We recommend similar studies be conducted to validate the indicators developed in this research and inform the development of a language appreciation framework which may be used for all kinds of communities.

References

- Adonis, D. & Couch, J. (2017). "The trails to get there": Experiences of attaining higher education for Igorot indigenous peoples in the Philippines. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 57, 197-216.
- Andaya, J. (2019). The basic education research agenda of the Department of Education and system assessment in the K to 12 basic education curriculum. In D. Ocampo & K. Lucasan (Eds.), *Key Issues in Curriculum, Assessment, and ICT in Basic Education* (pp. 3-9). Quezon City: University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies.
- Boon, E., & Polinsky, M. (2015). From silence to voice: empowering heritage language speakers in the 21st century. Retrieved from http://cervantesobservatorio.fas.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/007_informes_mp_from-silence.pdf
- Brooks, N. (1977). A perspective on language: Acquisition-application-appreciation the 1977 northeast conference. *The Modern Language Journal*, 61, 5/6, 262-65.
- Busch, B. (2018). The language portrait in multilingualism research: Theoretical and methodological considerations. *Working Papers in Urban Language & Literacies*. Paper 236.
- Congressional Commission on Education (1993). Making education work. Quezon City: Congressional Oversight Committee.
- Department of Education. (2013). DepEd Order No. 43, 2013 – Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) of Republic Act No. 10533 Otherwise Known as the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013.
- Department of Education. (2011). DepEd Order No. 62, s. 2011 – Adopting the National Indigenous Peoples (IP) Education Policy Framework.
- Department of Education. (2015). DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2015 – Adopting the Indigenous Peoples Education Curriculum Framework.
- Department of Education. (2017). DepEd Order No. 34, s. 2017 – Guidelines on the Formation of Consultative and Advisory Bodies on Indigenous Peoples Education (IPed) in Regions Implementing the IPed Program.
- Department of Education. (2019). DepEd Order No. 21, s. 2019 – Policy Guidelines on the K to 12 Basic Education Program.
- Hennink, M. (2014). *Focus group discussions: understanding qualitative research*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hyvonen, P., Kronqvist, E., Jarvela, S., Maata, E., Mykannen, A., & Kurki, K. (2014). Interactive and child-centred research methods for investigating efficacious agency of children. *Journal of Early Childhood Education Research*, 3, 82-107.

- Ocampo, D., & Lucasan, K. (Eds.) (2019). *Key Issues in Curriculum, Assessment, and ICT in Basic Education*. University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies.
- Stemler, S. (2001). An overview of content analysis. *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation*, 7, 1-6.
- UNESCO. (2003). Convention for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage. [PDF file]. Retrieved from: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001325/132540e.pdf>.
- UNESCO. (2019). Systematic monitoring of education for all. [PDF file]. Retrieved from: <http://www5.unescobkk.org/education/efatraining/module-a3/3-types-of-indicators/>
- United Nations. (2007). United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. [PDF file]. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html>
- United Nations. (2019). Backgrounder - Traditional knowledge. [PDF file]. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2019/04/Traditional-Knowledge-backgrounder-FINAL.pdf>
- Wilson, M. & Sapsford, R. (2006). Asking questions. In R. Sapsford & V. Jupp (Eds.), *Data collection and analysis* (pp. 93-122). London: Sage Publications.

About the author

Kathrina Lorraine Lucasan

Author

Kathrina Lucasan is a Senior Research Associate of the University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies - Education Research Program (UP CIDS-ERP). She also worked with the Department of Education Office of the Undersecretary for Curriculum and Instruction.

Dina Ocampo

Co-author

Dina Ocampo is a faculty member of the University of the Philippines. She teaches literacy courses at the College of Education. Presently, she is the convener of the Education Research Program at the UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS).

Anne Sheila Choi

Co-author

Anne Tan Choi is a research fellow for the UP CIDS-ERP. She was a former lecturer handling literacy education courses at the University of the Philippines Open University.

Rozanno Rufino

Co-author

Rozanno Rufino is the Convenor of the DO62 Indigenous Peoples Education Partnership Initiative of De La Salle Philippines and a senior education policy consultant for the Asian Development Bank. He studied economics and anthropology and trained in cultural heritage management.

DOI

British Council
10 Spring Garden,
London SW1A 2BN
United Kingdom

© British Council 2020

The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities.